Exploring Students' Perspective on Project Based Learning Approach

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ABSTRACT: In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on innovative pedagogical approaches that aim to enhance language learning experiences, particularly within the realm of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). One such approach that has gained traction is project-based learning (PjBL), which offers a dynamic framework for integrating language acquisition with disciplinary content and real-world problem-solving. This study investigates students' perceptions of project-based learning (PjBL) within the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) class. With a focus on understanding how learners engage with and perceive PjBL methodologies in ESP contexts, this research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing interviews and observation to gather insights from a participant of 15 students. Findings reveal multifaceted perspectives on the efficacy, challenges, and benefits of PjBL in ESP education. Students express positive perceptionss toward PjBL, noting its effectiveness in enhancing language proficiency, fostering critical thinking skills, and promoting real-world application of language learning. However, issues such as time constraints and varying levels of group dynamics also emerge. These findings highlight the importance of tailored pedagogical strategies that align with students' needs and preferences, suggesting avenues for enhancing PjBL implementation in ESP classrooms. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on innovative pedagogical approaches in language education, providing valuable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers aiming to optimize learning experiences in ESP contexts.

KEYWORDS: Project-Based Learning, challenges, benefits, students' perception

I. INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, soft skills such as critical thinking, cooperation, communication, and creativity, sometimes known as the four Cs, are in great demand in any setting and for any type of job (Van Laar et al., 2020).. As a result, those abilities are critical for people to master, and the most effective way to do so is through educational resources (Lawati & Khan, 2023).

In response, Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture implemented a new policy known as "Merdeka Belajar" or Freedom to Learn, which incorporates the 4Cs by including Project Based Learning (PjBL) as one of the learning models that teachers should use to help their students learn PjBL is highly recommended since it enables students to explore their ability to communicate, collaborate with their mates to complete their assignments, have critical thinking to solve any problems, and have creativity, as well (González et al., 2022).

Project-based learning is the most effective alternative for implementing "Merdeka Belajar" as an innovative and creative learning model, which will enable students to apply the concept of independent learning, including critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and the identification of the most effective solutions to the challenges they encounter (Maros et al., 2021). It is an endeavor to ensure that students acquire and master the skills of the 21st century (Kai et al., 2021). PjBL may assist students in the development of the four C's—communication, collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving, and creativity and innovation—that are the skills of the twenty-first century, as supported by the research findings of the Buck Institute for Education (BIE) (in Önur & Kozikoğlu, 2020). This is consistent with the previous or current curriculum, which emphasizes scientific methodologies and the authentic evaluation of learning outcomes through observation, inquiry, exploration, associating, and communication. Consequently, the PjBL model can serve as a connection to this.

Additionally, PjBL is perceived as a beneficial instructional approach that enables students to evaluate their aptitude and proficiency. It influences the creativity and critical thinking of students(Sumarni & Kadarwati, 2020). Consequently, PjBL had a substantial impact on students' comprehension of subjects and improved their readiness for professional work (Gary, 2020). Additionally, PjBL not only motivates students and helps them prepare for college, careers, and citizenship, but it also helps them

meet academic requirements and perform well on tests that require critical thinking and in-depth knowledge ((Dias & Brantley-Dias, 2017). (Manurung, 2018) discovered that PjBL can enhance students' learning creativity.

At the university level, Project-based Learning (PjBL) involves actively exploring and cultivating knowledge and abilities, which is in complete harmony with the core premise of PjBL (Lasauskiene & Rauduvaite, 2015). Furthermore, they stated that the outcomes of PjBL are comprehensively detailed, encompassing students' motivation, college readiness, career paths, civic engagement, and aiding students in attaining their objectives and excelling in rigorous examinations. Nevertheless, based on the writer's experience, adopting Project-based Learning (PjBL) at the university level poses significant challenges. Most students, regardless of whether they are in undergraduate or graduate programs, are typically accustomed to engaging in traditional or conventional methods of learning in the classroom. This includes tasks such as completing assignments based on lectures, creating summaries, and participating in group discussions centered around meeting topics or course materials. Consequently, students face difficulties in completing their projects since they fail to exert their utmost effort in exploring their potential (Almulla, 2020).

Furthermore, along with the PjBL, the learning of English in ESP class is still hampered by numerous issues. One of the difficulties in learning English is that teachers or lecturers frequently use the lecture approach, which involves a one-way learning process from lecturer to students. This issue will undoubtedly interfere with students' ability to master English language competency and the ability to speak English effectively and enthusiastically based on certain purposes. Lessons that are teacher-centered in learning make it challenging for students to master the English language with specific purposes. The learning activities that prioritize emphasizing the acquisition of English through suitable and relevant learning are those that should be put primarily (Marcu, 2020)

Project Based Learning differs from traditional instruction due to its focus on student-centered, multidisciplinary, and integrated activities that simulate real-world circumstances. Project Based Learning in the ESP class prioritizes a student-centered approach that is based on current issues and practices. The Project-Based Learning (PjBL) approach in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) class aims to develop students' skills in using strategies to effectively solve complex problems they encounter in their everyday lives. This approach is based on inquiry methodologies that foster a genuine interest in themes and issues that directly impact the students' lives (Guo et al., 2020).. One of the many benefits of PjBL is that it promotes student engagement in self-directed learning that is tailored to their own interests and needs (Gary, 2020). The statement highlights the importance of constructivist teaching and learning in providing a meaningful context for English language acquisition. This approach ensures that the learning process is not isolated or detached from real-life situations or the students' daily experiences (Anazifa & Djukri, 2017).

Investigation of the PjBL and ESP have been the subject of several studies, they are; (Ergül & Kargın, 2014), (Anazifa & Djukri, 2017), (Dias & Brantley-Dias, 2017), (Guo et al., 2020),(Kim, 2020)), (Almulla, 2020), (Sumarni & Kadarwati, 2020), and (Hira & Anderson, 2021). Unfortunately, only limited numbers which focused on university students and English class, most of them focused on primary schools students' and on other subjects, as well. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to fill this vacuum by focusing on the implementation of Project Based Learning (PjBL) in the context of ESP class, with a specific focus on students' perceptions. As language educators increasingly recognize the importance of engaging learners in authentic tasks that mirror professional contexts, understanding students' attitudes and experiences with PjBL becomes paramount.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform ESP pedagogy and curriculum design, offering insights into how Project Based Learning can be effectively integrated into language instruction to better meet the needs and goals of learners. By elucidating the factors that influence students' perceptions of PjBL, educators can tailor instructional practices to optimize learning outcomes and foster a more engaging and impactful learning environment (Syarifah & Emiliasari, 2019).

II. METHOD

This qualitative research is intended to reveal the students' perception on Project Based Learning in English class in particularly in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). ESP is one of the courses that should be learned by students in the Master of English Language Education Program of Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar. ESP course in this case is a subject learned by students whose mostly are teachers or educators of English. Thus, the goals of the ESP course are to provide students with knowledge about ESP and to prepare them to teach English or to have English course for learners with their certain and specific needs.

15 Students in the ESP Class were the participants of the study. They were interviewed and observed after completing two projects as their tasks, the first was a project in a team and the second one was individually project. Since it is still as the effect of the pandemic situation, so the learning process, project tasks, interview and the observation were online.

The first project was having a small group to do a project. The fundamental objective of this project-based learning is to provide students the skills they need to cooperate, work together, and empathize with others. Through the formation of small study groups and the completion of projects, this PjBL approach is extremely successfully implemented to learners (Maros et al.,

2021).The second project was individual one. The main target is students' autonomous learning is to complete assigned tasks which is the goal of PjBL.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

After collecting data from the interview and observation, the findings show that there are 5 items mentioned as the response of the participants. We distinguished them into three catogories; the efficacy of PjBL, the advantages of PjBL, and challenges of PjBL. The items along with the responses can be seen in the following:

1. Positive Attitudes towards PjBL

The data analysis revealed a prevalent positive attitude among students towards Project Based Learning (PjBL) in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) class. During interviews, students consistently expressed satisfaction with PjBL, citing its effectiveness in enhancing various aspects of language proficiency. For instance, many students highlighted improvements in their speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills as a direct result of engaging in PjBL activities. Moreover, they appreciated the opportunity to apply language skills in authentic, real-world contexts, which they perceived as more meaningful and engaging compared to traditional classroom exercises.

2. Effectiveness in Language Proficiency

The findings further substantiated the positive impact of PjBL on language proficiency. Through qualitative analysis of interview responses, it became evident that students perceived tangible improvements in their linguistic abilities after participating in PjBL projects. For example, students reported feeling more confident in expressing themselves in English, both orally and in written form, as they actively applied language skills while collaborating with peers to solve real-world problems. Such immersive language experiences within the PjBL framework were consistently cited as valuable contributors to overall language development.

3. Fostering Critical Thinking Skills

In addition to language proficiency, students acknowledged the role of PjBL in fostering critical thinking skills. Through thematic analysis of interview data, instances were identified where students engaged in higher-order thinking processes, such as problem-solving, decision-making, and analytical reasoning, during project-based activities. Many students attributed their enhanced critical thinking abilities to the cognitive challenges posed by PjBL tasks, which required them to analyze complex information, synthesize ideas, and evaluate alternative solutions collaboratively.

4. Real-World Application of Language Learning

One of the most notable findings was the perceived real-world applicability of language learning through PjBL. Students consistently emphasized the relevance of PjBL projects to their future academic and professional endeavors, noting how they were able to transfer language skills acquired in class to authentic contexts outside the classroom. Examples cited included conducting research, delivering presentations, and engaging in intercultural communication, all of which reinforced the practical utility of language skills acquired through PjBL experiences.

5. Challenges and Limitations

Despite the overwhelmingly positive perceptions of PjBL, students also identified several challenges and limitations associated with its implementation. Time constraints emerged as a recurring issue, with students expressing concerns about balancing PjBL projects with other academic commitments. Additionally, variations in group dynamics posed challenges, as some students reported difficulties in coordinating with peers or resolving conflicts within project teams. These challenges, while acknowledged, did not diminish students' overall enthusiasm for PjBL but highlighted areas for potential improvement in its implementation.

PjBL was positively viewed by students as a demanding experience since it required them to think critically and creatively in order to solve problems related to the tasks they completed individually or in groups. This is similar with Kultsum et al., (2022). They also designed the course design under the guidance of lecturers and questions. They usually work together and communicate actively with other members of their group to accomplish their tasks with enthusiasm. It is supported by Guo et al., (2020). findings . Furthermore, students are encouraged to enhance their 4Cs skills by the PjBL-based course design that they want to complete (Bell, 2010). It is important to comprehend how students feel about Project Based Learning (PjBL) in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs for a number of reasons.

The positive outcomes observed in this study underscore the potential of PjBL to optimize language learning experiences in ESP contexts. By integrating language acquisition with disciplinary content and real-world problem-solving, PjBL engages students in meaningful learning activities that transcend traditional classroom boundaries as found also by (Sapan et al., 2020). Moreover, the development of critical thinking skills through PjBL aligns with the broader goals of education in preparing students for academic and professional success in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

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In summary, investigating students' perceptions of Project Based Learning in ESP classes is essential for assessing effectiveness, understanding learning preferences, soliciting feedback for improvement, promoting student-centered learning, and enhancing student engagement. By incorporating students' perspectives into the design and implementation of PBL initiatives, educators can create more engaging, relevant, and impactful learning experiences for learners in ESP contexts.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has provided valuable insights into students' perceptions of Project Based Learning (PjBL) in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes. The findings highlight a prevailing positive attitude towards PjBL among students, who perceive it as an effective pedagogical approach for enhancing language proficiency, fostering critical thinking skills, and promoting real-world application of language learning. Despite encountering challenges such as time constraints and varying group dynamics, students overwhelmingly value the immersive and authentic learning experiences offered by PjBL projects.

This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on innovative pedagogical approaches in language education by amplifying student voices and perspectives. By centering students' experiences and perceptions, educators and policymakers can make informed decisions to optimize learning experiences in ESP contexts. Future research endeavors may explore additional factors influencing PjBL implementation, investigate the long-term effects of PjBL on language proficiency and academic achievement, and examine the transferability of PjBL skills to real-world contexts beyond the classroom.

Furthermore, the findings of this study underscore the transformative potential of Project Based Learning in English for Specific Purposes classes, emphasizing its role in empowering students as active participants in their own learning journey and preparing them for success in academic, professional, and global contexts.

V. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The implications of the findings underscored the need for tailored pedagogical strategies that align with students' needs and preferences in ESP classrooms. Educators and curriculum developers can leverage the insights gained from students' perceptions of PjBL to refine instructional practices, address challenges, and optimize learning experiences. Recommendations include providing adequate support and resources for PjBL implementation, promoting effective group collaboration skills, and integrating reflective practices to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes in ESP contex.

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